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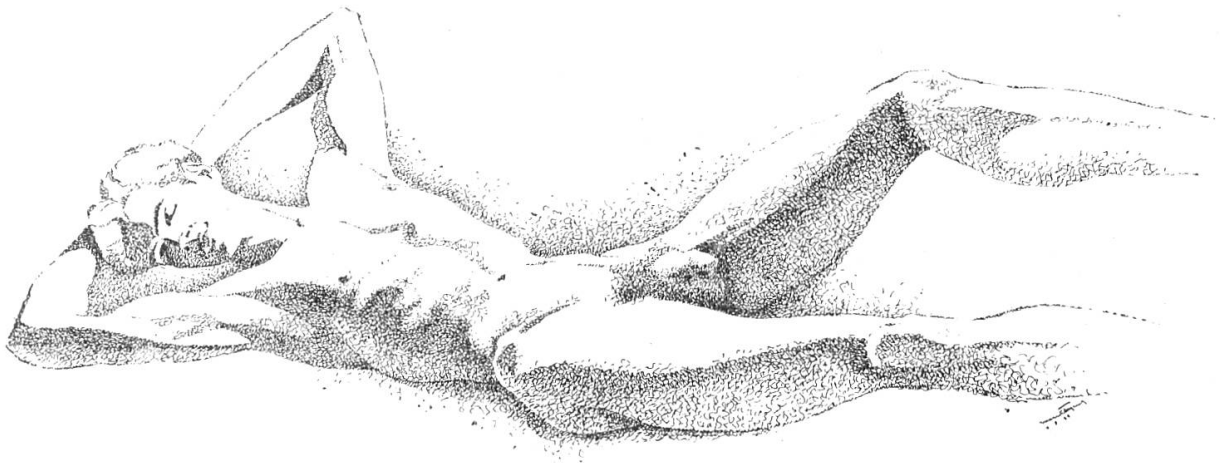
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New Eden, Melanesia

by

*Luther Allen*

*'... a masterpiece of God ... a temple of the Holy Spirit ...'*

*Pius XII*

I

I sprawl on the decking  
Of a wrecked barge  
The surf awash around it.  
The morning air is clear  
The sky has something of the sea's profundity  
The sea has something of the lightness of the air.  
Last night's diluvian rain  
Washed clean the conscience of the world  
And all is young again  
Is ready for a Venus-birth.  
The long and glowing curve of sand  
The broad sea-brink  
Plays natural host to man.  
Alone, in pairs, in groups,  
Small human figures dominate  
The sea and land.  
I am witness of a great rebirth.

Between the mindless forest and the mindless sea  
Common humanity  
In simple nakedness  
Resumes its ancient dignity  
Asserts its worth.  
The uniform  
Which never really had the man  
Is shed  
And lies, a pile of rags,  
Staining the golden earth.  
Here reigns the common rank,  
The highest,  
Humanhood.  
Pico, Montaigne, Le Nain and, yes, Poussin  
Stand at my elbow beaming  
'At last he's understood!'

## II

Before me three young men  
With arms upflung  
And swaying in their progress,  
Water glistening on their fluent-moving backs,  
Foam swirling round their flanks,  
Push forward  
Against the shoreward surge.  
Each body all involved from wrist to toe  
Powered by an urgent will, carefree,  
Dancing a deliberate dance they go  
Into the dancing sea.

## III

Before me on the beach  
A boy lies prone  
Arms flung infant-wise above his head,  
His legs wide-spread.  
His eyes are closed, his mask is bland,  
Dreamless he lies,  
Abandoned and undone,  
He-bride of the sun,  
Between the hot sky and the hotter sand.  
Spirit and sense are twins new-born  
In the young flesh, tired, worn.

#### IV

I raise my eyes, approaching me  
Two stalwarts hand in hand  
Ambling along the boulevard of sand,  
Laughing and looking out to sea.  
The palm which lately cradled the grenade  
To the friend's palm is laid  
As an unconscious token:  
'We live!  
'Our comrades died, went mad, were broken.'  
In these last two love is intensified  
By that of all life-loving friends who died.  
Suddenly one of them again is struck  
By a surging sense of their great good luck.  
Lord! What a luxury!  
Simply to be alive and free!  
He breaks away and dashes toward the waves  
Laughing and leaping.  
Froth of the heart-spring's weeping?

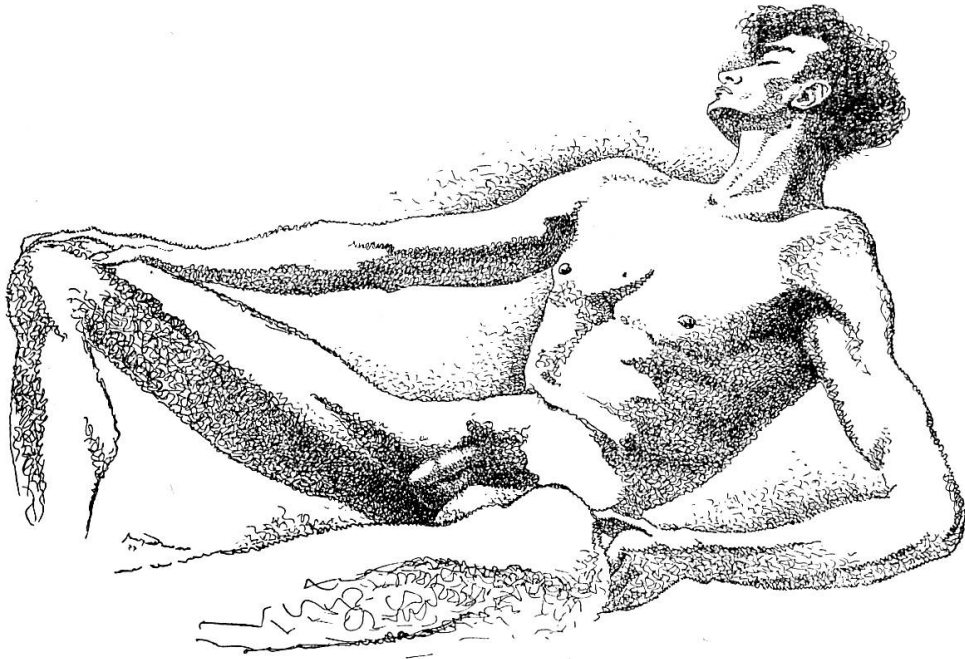
#### V

The unknown soldier said:  
'Have another cigarette before I go?  
'You're lucky, camping always on the beach, you  
    know . . .'  
I asked him 'Why?'  
'Well . . . It's California's ocean too.  
'You feel like it almost belongs to you,  
'It's almost part of home, now ain't that so?'  
'It was a long way out,  
'We've got a long way back to go . . .'  
'Yes, that's true,  
'But just the same, I sort of envy you . . .'

On the wrecked barge's deck,  
Between the sea and me,  
Orange against the ocean's green  
The unknown soldier sat  
Poised as reposeful and serene  
As the young Adam in the Sistine ceiling,  
Newly roused by God to life, to feeling,  
In the world's sweet morning light;  
Young Adam yet to know the night, and fear,  
Ignorant of the sense of loss and of desire,  
Young Adam yet to shed a tear,

Fresh Adam yet to tire.  
Perfect Adam, Godly built,  
Free of blemish and of guilt.

God knows before me sat  
A better man than that!  
A youth both long and well  
Acquainted with a very actual hell,  
Bearing the guilt  
Of blood his smooth hands spilt,  
Almost at home with the attenuated terror,  
Living—with death the price of slightest error—  
Tautly alert by dangerous day and treacherous night  
Though weighted, drugged by ceaseless weariness,  
A tyrant to himself when hurt or when in fright;  
Before God, I confess it seemed to me  
Christ's master-agony  
Is in our time well-matched by such as he.



*Two drawings by Mario de Graaf*